Soothing Gout With Potassium: Is It Worth the Hype?

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Potassium and Gout — Should You Supplement?

Gout pain is excruciating. With a family history of gout, I've had family members equate it to breaking a bone when it flares up. Which always leaves me wondering – will I someday end up with the family curse?

My family members with gout "follow the rules" per se — take their medications as prescribed and follow a low purine diet, most of the time. However, I have heard rumors that a potassium supplement may help to ease the symptoms.

Before I discussed this with my family members, I did a little research of my own.

Why Potassium?

Obviously, potassium is absolutely necessary for our bodies to function. It stands to reason that if we are potassium sufficient, we could suffer from a host of different maladies — so why not gout?

Potassium is an electrolyte. In fact, it is so important for our bodies functioning that if our levels are not in sync, our hearts may not function adequately; an incorrect amount can cause heart arrhythmias. Potassium is also responsible for helping to maintain blood pressure, helping muscles contract, and maintaining fluid balance in the body.

Perhaps potassium is discussed as a treatment for gout because we often consume much less than is recommended in our diets; the National Academies of Sciences recommends that males over the age of 19 consume 3,400 mg of potassium per day (2,600 mg per day for females).

My Takeaway?

I think there is far too little, or too conflicting, evidence to consider a potassium supplement for the treatment of gout. I found no reputable sources stating that potassium was a worthy treatment.

It is entirely possible that potassium could be the golden ticket for gout treatment, but in my opinion, I would feel uncomfortable discussing it with my relatives without sound evidence to back it up.

Instead, unless contraindicated by another health condition, I would ensure that your diet is rich in food sources of potassium. Food sources of potassium include fruits and vegetables, especially leafy greens, tomatoes, eggplant, potatoes, dairy, fish, nuts, and poultry.

Here are some specific examples of foods rich in potassium with their respective amounts of potassium:

- 1 cup low-fat milk (350 to 380 milligrams)

- 1 cup cooked spinach (840 milligrams)
- 6 ounces yogurt (260 to 435 milligrams)
- 1 baked potato with skin (926 milligrams)

- 1 medium banana (425 milligrams)
- 1 cup cooked broccoli (460 milligrams)
- ½ cup strawberries (125 milligrams)
- 1 medium tomato (290 milligrams)
- 1 cup cantaloupe (430 milligrams)

As you can see, there are plenty of foods that are rich in potassium — but they are "real" foods and not foods that come in a package, like we so often eat these days, which may make it harder to reach the goal for potassium intake.

Should you decide to pursue a potassium supplement as a treatment for gout, please speak with your physician first. Potassium is a potent electrolyte and if you take too much, it can affect the heart and kidneys.

For example, it can cause heart arrhythmias. Supplementation will most likely require monitoring of blood levels of potassium to ensure they do not get too high. This is especially important if you already have diagnosed heart conditions or kidney conditions.